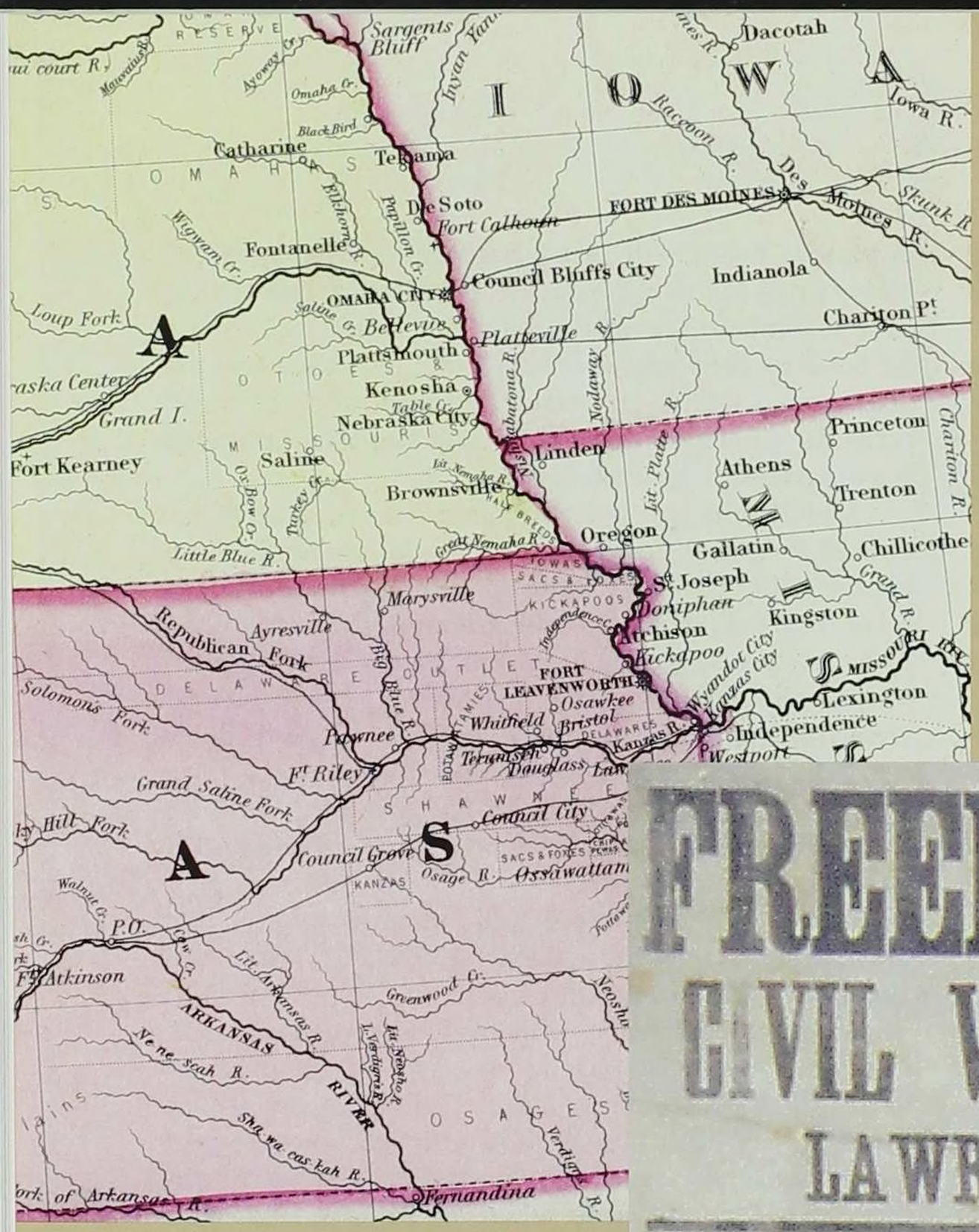
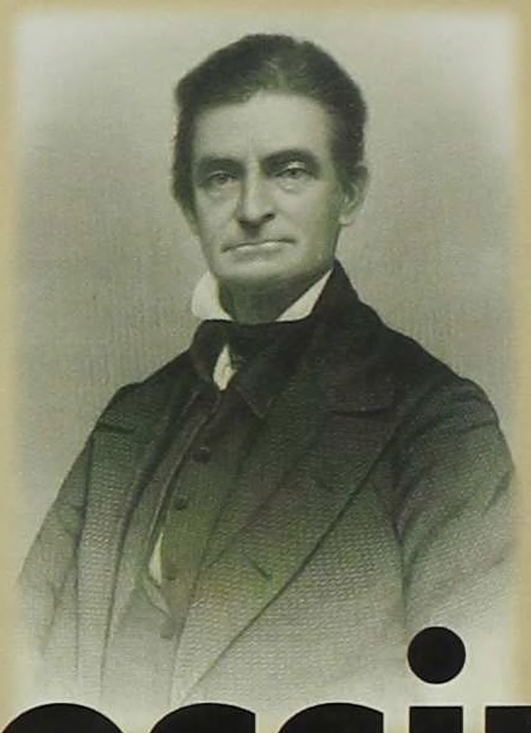




Crossing

FREEMEN ATTEND

CIVIL WAR IN KANSAS!

LAWRENCE IN ASHES!

By late reliable accounts from KANSAS, we learn that the FREE STATE MEN have been attacked by

BORDER RUFFIANS!

from Missouri, under Gen. WHITFIELD, and that Gov. SHANNON supplied the invaders with U. S. Muskets and Ammunition, with which unarmed men were shot down in the street of Lawrence, and innocent women and children driven from the town, their husbands and parents murdered, and their homes destroyed. The U. S. Troops not permitted by the authorities to interfere.

While these outrageous tragedies are being perpetrated in Kansas, by authority of the U. S., a UNITED STATES SENATOR is brutally attacked and beaten till almost dead by a

Slave Bully of South Carolina,

in the United States Senate. Such outrages unparalleled in the history of our Government, call upon all who love their country better than the chains of bondage, to speak in tones of thunder, that shall cause the SLAVE OLIGARCHY to tremble. The North should arouse! The cause is ours! Shall the bloody tyrant "subdue us?"

THE CRY IS FOR BLOOD!

In view of this sad state of affairs, there will be a Meeting of the Citizens of Iowa City, at the

STATE HOUSE, ON SATURDAY, MAY 31, 1856,

At half past Seven o'clock, P. M.

COME ONE! COME ALL!!

S. N. WOOD, Esq., whom Sheriff Jones failed to arrest at the time he was shot, has just arrived from Kansas, and will address the meeting.

SEATS RESERVED FOR LADIES.

Presented by J. S. Tuthill
Rep. Com. Com.

MANY CITIZENS.

lowa for Freedom

The Underground Railroad, Free State Settlers, and John Brown

by Lowell Soike

Jonas Jones was busy making bricks on a September day in 1854 when he stopped to write a friend: "You have doubtless been informed by Br. Todd of the escape of five 'human chattels' from their master on the 4th of July. We expect they are safe now."

Jones was referring to the first incident in which the residents of Tabor, Iowa, assisted fugitive slaves. In early July, a Mormon family traveling from Mississippi to Salt Lake City had stopped to camp overnight at Tabor, in extreme southwestern Iowa. Jesse West's hotel was under construction, and two of the Mormons' slaves talked with the builders as they retrieved water from West's well. The carpenters learned that five of the six slaves desired their freedom. Within a few days and with the help of Tabor residents, the runaways had crossed the Nishnabotna River and reached the home of Congregationalist minister and abolitionist George B. Hitchcock in Lewis, from where they quickly moved across Iowa to Illinois, entering Canada at Detroit.

In the years ahead, Jonas Jones would welcome the staunch abolitionist John Brown into his home. Other Tabor families would hide weapons headed to "bleeding Kansas" for the fight against proslavery Missourians and shelter runaways on the underground railroad.

Opposite: 1855 map of Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas and Nebraska territories, the epicenter of western dissension over slavery. Tabor is not shown; it is midway between Council Bluffs and Nebraska City. Top: John Brown, about 1857.

MAP: UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA. PORTRAIT: JAMES REDPATH, *THE PUBLIC LIFE OF CAPTAIN JOHN BROWN* (1860). BROADSIDE: SHSI (DES MOINES). SYMBOL: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Tabor—Antislavery Stronghold

Tabor was a thriving Congregational village of settlers hailing mainly from the area of Oberlin, Ohio, which was known for its antislavery stance and its reputed inclusion of blacks and females among the students at Oberlin College.

Maria Cummings was a student at the college when she married farmer George Gaston. Although not raised in Oberlin, he had absorbed the community's principles. To spread their beliefs in the West, the Gastons left Oberlin to work as missionaries among the Pawnee Indians in unorganized Nebraska, until 1847 when they returned. George Gaston's thoughts, however, turned increasingly back to the West. He was determined to create a settlement modeled on the religious and educational principles professed in Oberlin.

In September 1848 the Gastons assembled a few Oberlin families, and headed to southwestern Iowa. George's sister Elvira and her husband, Lester Platt, had already settled at a rural hamlet named Civil Bend.

Nearby lived Ira D. Blanchard and his wife; earlier they had served at a Baptist mission among the Indians in Kansas.

In the next few years, hordes of mosquitoes, severe malaria fever, and high water forced the Gastons and their group of Ohio Congregationalists to leave the bottomlands for the bluffs to the north, where they established Tabor.

As the leading spirit, George Gaston was the town founder who made things happen and, once an enterprise began, got things done. Together with John Todd, he brought forth a town in stark contrast to most of southwestern Iowa—where the prevailing sentiments were against abolition.

Although Tabor residents were not free of Northern prejudice towards blacks, they visibly opposed slavery in principle and practice. In October 1853 the Congregational church of Tabor formalized its early policies of antislavery and temperance, declaring that slavery should be treated as "any other flagrant sin."

Tabor was one of only a few strongly antislavery communities—mainly Congregational or Quaker—in central and western Iowa. The other antislavery strongholds lay in southeastern Iowa. Almost everywhere else in the state, Iowans expressed mixed, weak, or antagonistic attitudes toward antislavery. However, the antislavery cause was beginning to gain momentum in the early 1850s.

The Compromise of 1850 had brought some relief from rising tensions in the nation. Under the compromise, slavery was outlawed in California; residents in Utah and Nevada, and in the territories carved out of land acquired from Mexico, would vote on whether to allow slavery; and the District of Columbia ended the slave trade (though current slaveholders there were not affected). A stronger, more controversial Fugitive Slave Act, however, now required Northerners to help capture runaways. In 1854, when Congress passed the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act, antislavery feelings in Iowa swelled, and events would soon thrust Tabor into the national spotlight.

The antislavery movement was broadening its base with the renewal of westward settlement. Desires to create a new territory west of the Missouri River were sweeping Missouri and Iowa, partly in hopes of securing a transcontinental railroad route. In December 1853, Senator Augustus C. Dodge from Iowa introduced a bill establishing the territorial government of Nebraska. The bill was referred to the Committee on Territories, which included Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and George W. Jones of Iowa.

Slavery's future was at that moment governed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery above the southern border of Missouri—except in Missouri itself, which became a state in 1821.

Douglas, as chair of the Senate committee, reported out the bill in late January 1854. It recommended dividing the vast unorganized territory in two and voiding the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The bill would allow popular sovereignty, by which free white men living in Kansas Territory and Nebraska Territory would vote on slavery's status. After months of debate and drafting, the bill was signed into law on May 30, 1854.

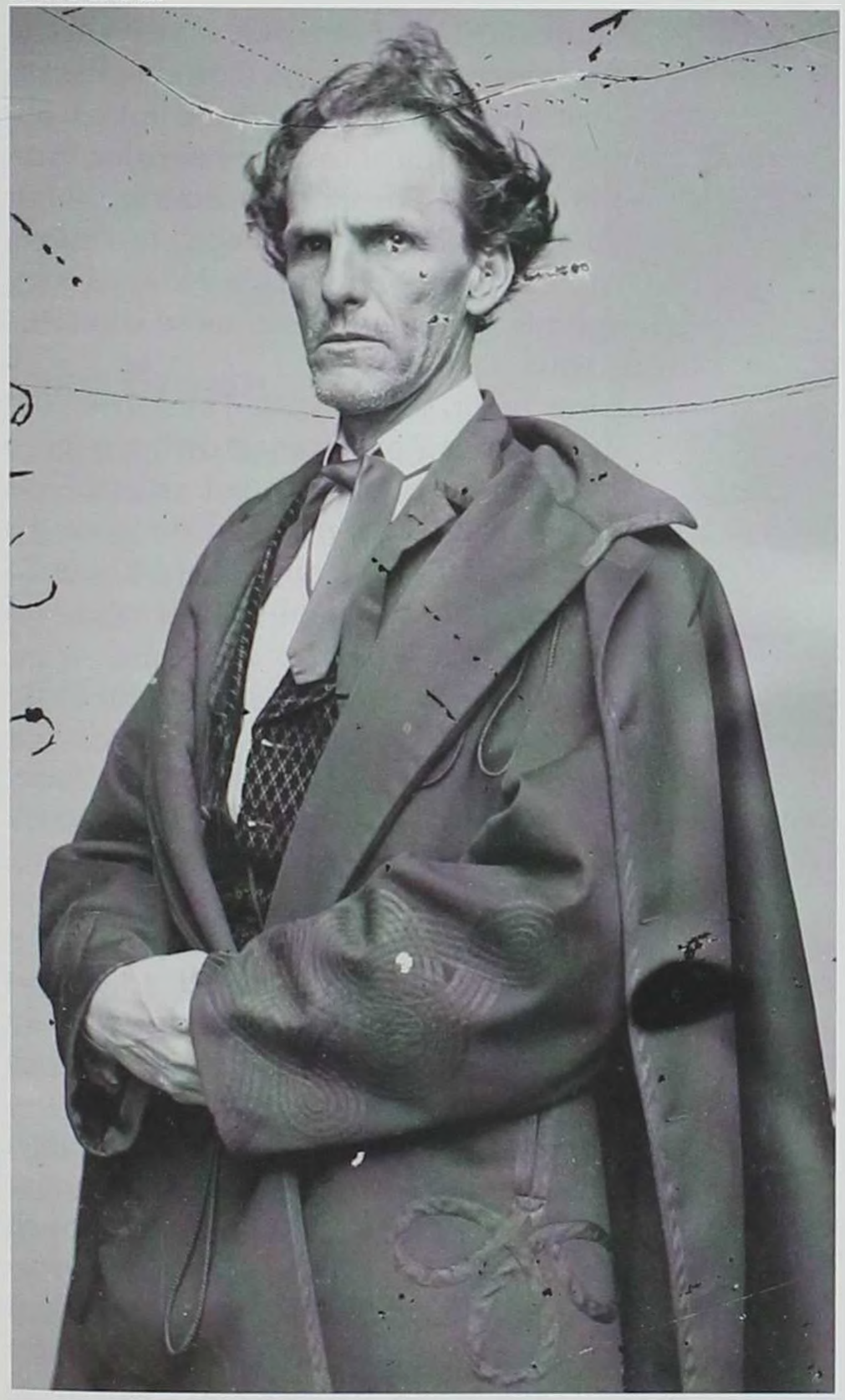
Free-State Emigrants to Kansas, 1854

The Kansas-Nebraska Act unleashed Southern and Northern acrimony, and partisans on both sides quickly organized. It was assumed that Nebraska Territory would vote against slavery, but in Kansas Territory demographics was destiny. Missourians in particular had a large stake in the outcome. One in eight Missouri families owned slaves—some 90,000 slaves by 1855. If Kansas became antislavery, Missouri would be surrounded by free states on three sides.

Missouri's proximity to Kansas Territory gave proslavery men an initial advantage. Western Missourians poured into eastern Kansas and controlled territorial government elections, often by crossing over to fraudulently vote and then returning to Missouri. Senator David Rice Atchison of Missouri justified their voting practice: "If a set of fanatics and demagogues a thousand miles off [in New England] can afford to advance their money and exert every nerve to abolitionize Kansas and exclude the slaveholder, what is your duty, when you reside within one day's journey of the Territory, and when your peace, quiet, and property depend on your action?" These election tactics in 1854 and 1855 brought about a proslavery territorial legislature and a number of proslavery, anti-black, anti-fugitive slave laws.

Northerners, especially those from New England, were also determined to colonize Kansas with those who would vote against slavery. Supporters of the Free Soil Party and antislavery forces provided capital and arms and organized parties of settlers to move into the territory. The first influx of emigrants came by river and rail to St. Louis or Alton, and then boarded steamboats for a five-day trip upriver on the Missouri to border towns in western Missouri or Kansas. This growing tide of northern migration to Kansas was outpacing emigration from the South despite Missouri's urgent appeals to Southern leaders and the press.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Considered a "quintessential opportunist," James Lane was a Democrat and a major leader of the free-state movement. He was a fiery orator but not an abolitionist. During the Civil War, he formed the First Kansas Colored Volunteers; as a U.S. senator in 1865, he sided with Andrew Jackson's veto of the Civil Rights Bill.

This left proslavery Missourians one desperate option, to lay a stranglehold on western Missouri River traffic and turn back free-state settlers. They instituted blockades during the spring and summer of 1856. At steamboat landings at border towns—especially Liberty, Independence, and Weston—armed proslavery bands intercepted steamboats. Boarding parties looked for suspected Northern emigrants, searched their belongings and confiscated arms. Emigrant groups that protested or looked to be from New England faced being turned back. Soon the blockade escalated to include ferry crossings, to the worry of border-town merchants who relied on local trade.

By July, proslavery efforts had succeeded in blocking Northern emigrants but had angered eastern Missouri businessmen, who had been profiting greatly from Kansas emigration through St. Louis. A *New York Tribune* correspondent wrote, "The only open way [into the territory] is a tedious route through Iowa."

Free-state forces now had no choice but to create a safe route overland through Iowa. The small Congregationalist town of Tabor was uniquely positioned to serve as the main westernmost outpost for emigrants headed to Kansas.

Jim Lane and the Iowa Route, 1856

James H. Lane, a former Indiana congressman with Mexican War service and an emerging free-state leader, now pushed for the "line of communication with Kansas, via Iowa and Nebraska, which shall be at all times open for passage of emigrants, transmission of supplies &c &c."

The emergency situation also precipitated an organized Northern effort of relief and reinforcement to the struggling free-state settlers already in Kansas. Delegates from the various Kansas aid organizations convened in Buffalo, New York, in July and created a National Kansas Committee, headquartered in Chicago, to raise funds and coordinate relief efforts through Iowa. In Worcester, Massachusetts, radical Unitarian pastor Thomas Wentworth Higginson had raised $2,000 from Boston merchants to fund emigrant companies. (Higginson was one of six influential abolitionists in the East who fiercely supported John Brown. A few of the "Secret Six" would come to Iowa.)

Already the Kansas Central Committee of Iowa—formed with the support of Iowa's antislavery governor James Grimes—had been mapping a 300-mile overland route to the southwestern corner of the state. The route extended from Iowa City (then the westernmost point of the railroad from Chicago) to Sigourney to Oskaloosa to Knoxville to Indianola to Osceola to Quincy to Sidney in Fremont County. When free-state leaders discovered that Sidney was violently proslavery, they shifted the route terminus ten miles north to Tabor.

Jim Lane's fiery and dramatic oratory on behalf of Kansas relief and an overland route through Iowa attracted huge crowds. At a mass meeting in Chicago and then in major Iowa towns, his speeches swayed Northern sympathies to aid—financially and otherwise—the free-state cause. "There stood Lane," wrote an onlooker,

"contorting his thin, wiry form, and uttering bitterest denunciations in deep, husky gutturals." He defied "every recognized rule of rhetoric and oratory, at will he made men roar with laughter, or melt into tears, or clinch their teeth in passion."

A correspondent to the *St. Louis Gazette* called Iowa City "the central focus and hot bed of Kansas filibuster," led by Lane, a "fugitive traitor" who is "wild with excitement and exhibits a fury that strongly indicates insanity." As for the "filibusterers" about to leave Iowa City and descend upon Kansas, "quite a number are encamped in the grove east of the city, and tomorrow, it is said, the arrivals will make the number 500 strong." They "take cannon and arms, with munitions of war, and are, in fact, organized into regular military squads of companies."

Emigrants who had been turned back on their steamboat journey up the Missouri were now arriving in Iowa City from the river towns of Davenport and Keokuk. Lane also came to Iowa City, to coordinate 500 emigrants who had just arrived from Chicago with cannons and arms. Across southern Iowa, teams of men began clearing a wagon trail, grading slopes at stream crossings. They blazed trees and installed poles and stone piles for directing the emigrants from one hamlet to another.

The trail was initially dubbed the "northern route" or "Iowa route." Proslavery forces, however, maligned it as "Lane's Army of the North," a label designed to impugn the assembling newcomers not as peaceful settlers but as a disruptive, armed, invading, hostile force. Eventually over the years, the overland route became known historically as the "Lane Trail," in part to acknowledge Jim Lane's early advocacy for it.

Safe Haven in Tabor

The first large emigrant caravan, comprising several smaller companies, left Iowa City for Tabor in early July 1856. The journey across Iowa was far from easy, especially for those unaccustomed to crossing unsettled expanses. "I have traveled the whole breadth of the State of Iowa," a traveler recalled, "partly through a country so sparsely inhabited that we had to sleep two nights in our wagon." When rains moved in, the settlers' wagons bogged down or slowed to a crawl or worse. Emigrants complained of traveling "on foot in the heat of July over the broad Western prairies," while "the wild life which we are compelled to endure" for food "comes rather hard upon some of our party, who have been used to different fare."

Tabor was now but four years old. A year earlier, in May 1855, a new arrival had stepped off the stage in front of Jesse West's hotel and saw nothing but a town "of about a dozen houses, most of them being log huts, while a few were of sod." The most substantial building was a small school that also served as a church, meeting hall, and election polling place. Now, as Kansas-bound emigrants began to arrive, more construction was under way.

Upon reaching Tabor, settlers rested and then continued on to the Missouri River ferry crossing over to Nebraska City, "a sparse and extended village." As caravans proceeded from the ferry and up over the ridge, they halted. Reports had come in of 600 armed Missourians gathering at St. Joseph to intercept and prevent their movement into Kansas.

The flow of emigrant parties also backed up in Tabor after reports that "the entrance to Kansas via Nebraska was barred by a force of 1,500 'border ruffians' and that it was unsafe for small companies to attempt to go through." Emigrants stayed in Tabor, awaiting more arrivals to increase their strength. Free-state supporters brought ammunition and other supplies and helped forward and receive dispatches. The town also gave safe haven to free-state fighters, now actively countering proslavery harassment, fighting fire with fire.

Maria Cummings Gaston later described the effect of migrants on the frontier community. "That summer and autumn our houses, before too full, were much overfilled and our comforts shared with those passing to and from Kansas to secure it for Freedom. When houses would hold no more, woodsheds were temporized for bedrooms, where the sick and dying were cared for. Barns also were fixed for sleeping rooms. Every place a bed could be put or a blanket thrown down was at once so occupied. There were comers and goers all times of the day or night—meals at all hours—many free hotels, perhaps entertaining angels unawares. After battles they were here for rest—before for preparation. General Lane once stayed three weeks secretly while it was reported abroad that he was back in Indiana for recruits and supplies, where came ere long, consisting of all kinds of provisions, Sharps rifles, powder and lead. A cannon packed in corn made its way through the enemy's lines and ammunition of all kinds, in clothing and kitchen furniture, etc. etc. Our cellars contained barrels of powder, and boxes of rifles. Often our chairs, tables, beds, and such places were covered with what weapons everyone carried about him, so that if one needed and got time to rest a little in the day time, we had to remove the Kansas furni-

ture, or rest with loaded revolvers, cartridge boxes, and bowie knives piled around them, and boxes of swords under the bed."

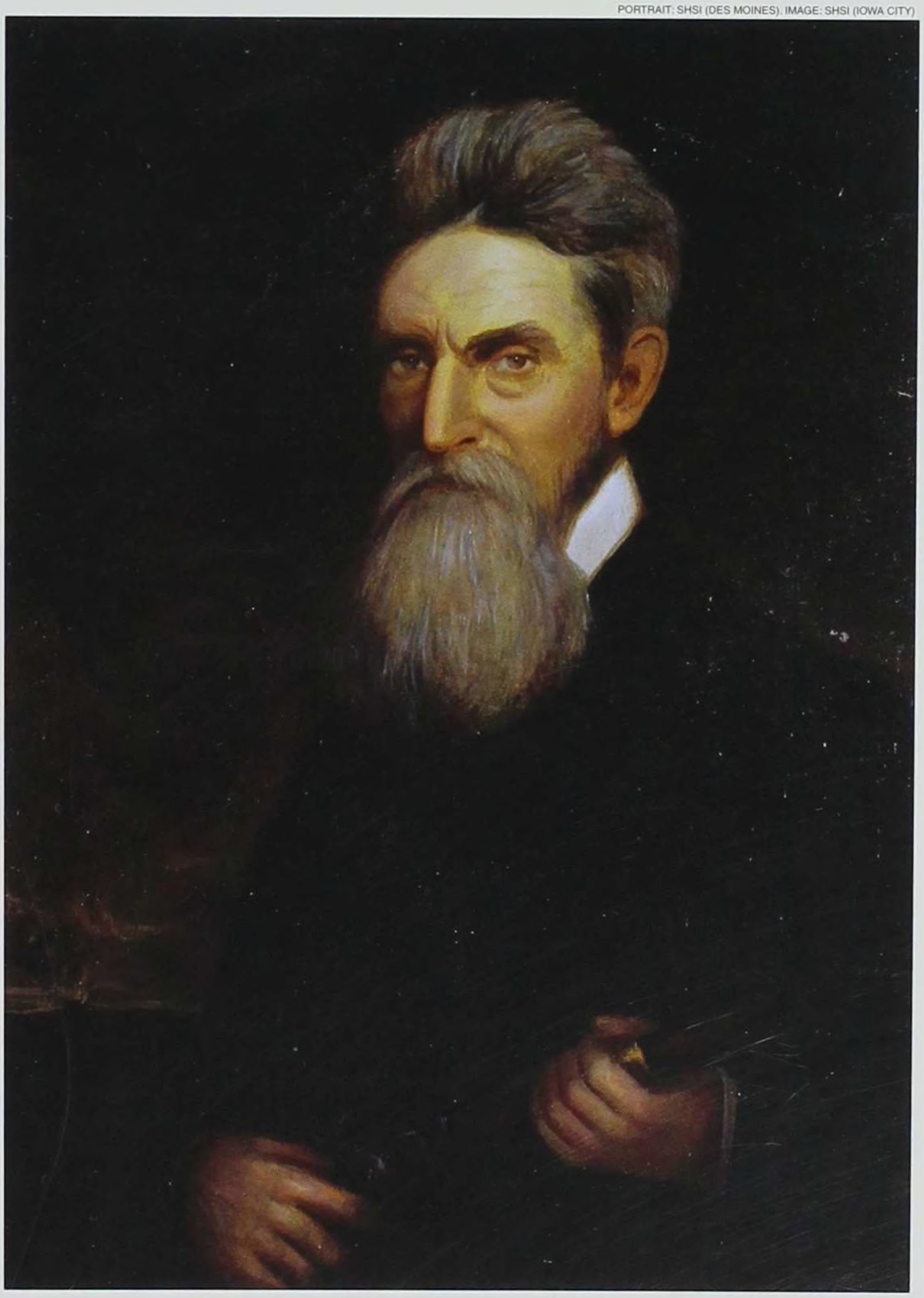
Tabor also provided safe haven for four of the sons of John Brown.

John Brown, 1856

Until 1856, the name of John Brown was unknown to many. But starting that year, his unflinching actions in Kansas Territory would terrify opponents while winning support from antislavery forces. The troubles in Kansas added to his conviction that the institution of slavery would not end without physical attack and war. His actions would culminate in the attack at Harpers Ferry three years later and thrust him permanently into American history.

Born in 1800 in Connecticut, John Brown was raised mostly in Ohio, grew up with a deep hatred for slavery, and failed in most businesses ventures. He became a passionate abolitionist. By the summer of 1855, five of his sons had emigrated to the vicinity of Osawatomie, Kansas, as part of the antislavery movement. Son John Jr. wrote his father: "The friends of freedom are not one fourth of them half armed, and as to Military Organization among them it no where exists in this territory unless they have recently done something in Lawrence."

PORTRAIT: SHSI (DES MOINES). IMAGE: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



With a burning building in the background, John Brown clutches a rifle in this portrait by Iowa City artist and photographer Isaac Wetherby. William Maxson, with whom Brown stayed in Springdale, commissioned the painting in 1860.

John Brown decided to join his sons in Kansas Territory, rousing support and collecting weapons on his way west. He arrived in October. Within a month, following the killing of a free-state man near Hickory Grove and a call for men to come to the defense of the free-state stronghold of Lawrence, he had mustered together a company of "Liberty Guards" at Osawatomie prepared to take up arms.

On May 21, 1856, more than 700 proslavery men attacked Lawrence, looting and destroying property. Brown's anger reached the boiling point. Four days later, Brown, with his sons and others, attacked and brutally murdered five proslavery men in Pottawattamie. While the event sent shock waves across the nation and spread fear among proslavery elements, it also brought respect among those settlers who were tired of their own passivity.

By mid-July, John Brown, four of his sons, and two other men were on the run, making their way north out

"Ruins of the Free State Hotel, Lawrence." The image appeared in Sara T. L. Robinson's book, *Kansas; Its Exterior and Interior Life* (1857), which chronicles the events in Kansas Territory, including the sacking of Lawrence by proslavery forces.

of Kansas. Some were injured, in poor health, and tired of the conflict in Kansas. Meeeting up with Jim Lane, Brown and son Frederick turned back. The others continued to Tabor, where they were kindly received.

Convalescing in Tabor and reviving his spirits, Owen Brown wrote his mother in late August: "There is now at this place a company of volunteers from Mane, Massachouesetss, & Michagan, about 80 in all. We hear lately that about 3 thousand Missourians have crossed at St Joe & other place & have gone armed into the teritory, that Governor Woodson has sent 400 mountainmen on to the fronteer to intercept our volenteers & prevent them from carrying in provision & Amunition, which is so much needed now in Kansas. . . . I have gained strength quite fast, & am now determined to go back into the Teritory. . . . We hope that men will volunteer, by the thousands from the states, well armed with plenty of money to buy provisions, which are scarce in KT. . . . If any of our folks write to us, or to me, (I assume an other name, (George Lyman) Direct to, George Lyman Tabor Fremont Co Iowa) Care of Jonas Jones Esqr. Mr. Jones will take them out of the office here & send them on by private conveyance."

Three days later, Owen's brother Frederick was killed in an attack by border ruffians at Osawatomie.

Fighting in Kansas again raised emigrants' fears of leaving Tabor. A local call went out for "friends of freedom" to escort the group to Kansas. Many in Tabor volunteered to go. John Todd was proposed as the escort leader. He had just found a pair of spurs when word came that the way was now safe for the emigrants to pass into Kansas.

Tensions had cooled upon arrival of the new territorial governor, John W. Geary. Geary concluded that the best chance for suppressing disorder was to set up a lawful territorial militia, thus excluding outside and unauthorized militias. This forced both Missourians and Jim Lane's forces to pull out of Kansas.

Emigrants in Tabor struck their tents and prepared to head to the ferry. Todd updated his Congregationalist colleague William Salter in Burlington: "The wants of Kansas constitute the absorbing topic of interest here now. . . . The road is said to be now open. Several skirmishes have taken place, & Lane is in command of the territory. Messrs. [Samuel Gridley] Howe, [Thaddeus] Hyatt, [Thomas Wentworth] Higginson &c have been

here, & anything which can be done here to forward the cause of Freedom will be done most cheerfully."

Lane by now had moved his troops to Tabor. John Speer, who had joined the group, described how Lane had stopped the company outside of town, and "admonished the men that in regard for the moral and religious principles of Tabor people, the men of the company were to conduct themselves with utmost decorum." They camped on the public square, drilled daily, and engaged in various sports, but they did not speak profanity or steal chickens.

Another company arrived in Tabor, loaded down with rifles, revolvers, bowie knives, ammunition, and a brass cannon and carriage. Their arrival drew a welcoming dinner from the community.

Rifles in the Parson's Cellar, 1856

The railroad out of Chicago now crossed the Mississippi at Burlington and extended to Mount Pleasant in southeastern Iowa. This shortened the overland trip to Tabor. In the late summer, Shalor W. Eldridge, proprietor of the free-state hotel that had burned down in the sacking of Lawrence in May, was now leaving Mount Pleasant with 200 volunteers organized into artillery and rifle companies and equipped with some 20 wagons of weapons, munitions, tents, and provisions.

Robert Morrow was a lieutenant under Eldridge. Morrow had visited Governor Grimes about the possibility of making state militia arms in Iowa City available for free-state forces. Grimes communicated to Morrow that "if I [Morrow] could get them without compromising him I could do so. I had letters to some good friends of Kansas; they got the keys to the arsenal, and in the night we loaded up three wagons with 200 stands of arms."

When Eldridge's expedition reached Tabor, Todd recalled, "they proceeded directly to the southwest corner of the public square, where they proceeded to pitch their tents. . . . They camped in front of the parson's gate, placing the mounted cannon in the center, and hoisting on it the stars and stripes. The 18 covered wagons were arranged in a circle, around the national banner. Outside the wagons was pitched a circle of tents, and outside the tents campfires were built, and still outside of the fires were placed armed sentinels. . . . On the next day about 200 men drilled on the public square, report of which was carried by the passengers in the stage coach to [St. Joseph, Missouri], only the numbers were multiplied tenfold—the 200 had become 2,000."

Lane and his men were also in Tabor, and Todd remembered that "there was not the best feeling" among the free-state emigrants towards Lane. They had been promised Sharps rifles. Manufactured in the East, the highly accurate breech-loading Sharps rifles intimidated western opponents who had only muskets and shotguns. Free-state forces had been promised these rifles first in Albany, then Cleveland, then Chicago, and finally in Tabor.

"The rifles were not here," Todd recounted, "and could not be furnished. It was then an object to pacify the men, and prevail on them to go forward. For this purpose General Lane mounted the cannon carriage, and calling the men around him, addressed them somewhat as follows: 'Comrades—a good soldier always grumbles. I know you have borne much already, since you left your homes. You have not always been fed on dainties, nor have you slept on down. You have endured with fortitude the perils, inconveniences, and privations of the way as good soldiers. Now you want Sharps rifles. Well, let me tell you, a Sharps rifle is a good weapon to use on an enemy at a distance, but it is good for nothing in a close encounter. If you come into a close fight (and I hope to God you may), a Sharps rifle is worthless. It is far inferior to a weapon with a bayonet. If I had my choice of arms, I would not arm more than one in ten with a Sharps rifle. As the arms you want are not here, I hope you will conclude to go on and see us through.'"

John Brown, then on his way out of Kansas, encountered the Eldridge train headed in. Because Brown and his men had with them an escaped slave, they split up, and narrowly missed federal troops. In Tabor, Brown stayed behind briefly to recuperate from dysentery before going east

Brown's sons Watson and Salmon Brown reached Tabor in early November in the last caravan of 1856, bringing with them rifles stored in Iowa City. "Two hundred Sharp's rifles, and ammunition were stored in the parson's cellar that winter," Todd recalled, "a cannon was in his barn—besides many boxes of sabers, rifles, muskets, accoutrements, boots and clothing. Geo B. Gaston's accommodations for storage were also all in requisition."

In Tabor, life settled back into a more predictable routine, except for a threatening event in December. On Christmas Day, Martha Todd wrote to her father in Ohio: "Our little town place has been visited again by a slave catcher from Jackson Co. Missouri, and he expresses great fears for our town. We supposed warrants would be obtained to search all our houses, but they have not appeared a second time as yet. The al-

leged slaves, who had escaped from Lexington & Kansas City though Kansas, but lost their way in Nebraska, and fell into two slavery hands, and were taken and lodged in Linden jail. By setting fire to the jail they escaped and finally came here, tho they had been warned of this place, as a place 'where the people get rich by selling slaves to New Orleans.' We hope they are now safely on their way to a land of freedom tho' some may be base enough to betray them in this state.

"We feared not their warrants because of finding [the runaways], but because of some arms, placed here by authority designed for K[ansas]." A bad snowstorm arrived the next day; the slave catchers did not return.

John Brown stayed in the East for several months, raising funds and volunteers for the conflict he expected to resume in Kansas in 1857. He continued to use Tabor as his western headquarters, with Jonas Jones in charge of the supplies.

Delayed and still lacking forces, Brown finally arrived in August 1857. He checked on the 200 rifles stored in Todd's cellar since the winter and found "the arms and ammunition voted me by the Massachusetts State [Kansas] Committee nearly all here and in middling good order—some a little rusted. Have overhauled and cleaned up the worst of them."

Meanwhile, Hugh Forbes, an adventurer and 1848 fighter in Garibaldi's failed Italian Revolution, had come to town, hired by Brown to drill his troops, and the two practiced target shooting and studied Forbes's book *The Patriotic Volunteer*. It was not long before Brown and Forbes began discussing a plan to take possession of the federal arsenal and armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, and to arm slaves for an uprising. But key differences in opinion soon led to disagreements. Forbes headed back east; most of Brown's men left Tabor for Nebraska City; and John and Owen Brown went to Lawrence. Brown quietly moved about the territory, recruiting young men who had acquired the taste for battle.

By late November, Brown was breaking down his outpost; Kansas struggles were no longer in view. On December 4, his men loaded wagons and left Tabor. Their intent was to reach Ashtabula, Ohio, where they would train for the next several months.

Winter Quarters in Springdale, 1857/58

Travel across Iowa was slow. Brown and his men camped in the country, avoiding communities. Huddled around fires, they discussed the Virginia plans, slavery, and the Bible. Not until Christmas were they past Marengo in eastern Iowa. Finally, the group arrived in Springdale, a small Friends community in Cedar County, where they were safe among Brown's Quaker friends.

Brown was nearly out of funds and unable to raise any. Across the nation, the Panic of 1857 had set in and money was becoming scarce. Brown struck a deal with Springdale farmer William Maxson; in exchange for Brown's wagons Maxson would provide room and board for the men. On January 15, 1858, Brown left to meet with supporters in the East. His men trained and drilled in Springdale into the early spring; they became good friends with many of the residents and attracted a few young men to their cause.

In April, Brown and his men headed to Chatham, Canada, to convene with his supporters. Hundreds of fugitive blacks had settled there, and Brown hoped he could recruit some for the Virginia attack.

Within a few weeks, however, he faced another delay. A frustrated Hugh Forbes had written Brown's supporters and antislavery congressmen, demanding money or threatening to publish Brown's plans for Harpers Ferry. At a meeting with key financial backers—Gerrit Smith, Theodore Parker, Samuel Howe, George Stearns, and Frank Sanborn (five of the Secret Six)—the decision was made to postpone the attack for a year. Brown would go back to Kansas so as to discredit any Virginia plans disclosed by Forbes.

Under the name of Shubel Morgan, Brown kept a low profile from June through November 1858. Then, on December 19, began an event that fueled the legend of John Brown in Kansas.

On that evening, Jim Daniels, a mulatto slave of Harvey G. Hicklin's in Vernon County, Missouri, crossed the county line into Kansas. There he spoke with George Gill, one of Brown's men from Iowa, telling him that he and his family were about to be sold and sent to Texas.

Brown mounted a rescue effort the next night. He and ten men crossed into Missouri and rode to the Hicklin farm to set free Jim Daniels, his pregnant wife, and two children. On a neighboring farm they freed five more slaves and took two white prisoners. Meanwhile, eight more of Brown's men under Aaron Stephens went to the farm of David Cruise; Daniels had told them a slave there wanted her freedom. They had just entered Cruise's house when Stephens—thinking Cruise was reaching for a gun—shot him.

The murder of Cruise outraged local residents, and Kansas newspapers were largely hostile. Times were relatively quiet and this was no time to stir up trouble when the free-state cause seemed close to winning.

Some eastern newspapers, however, carried reports in a more glorious light. As Brown hoped would happen later in Virginia, the incident provoked panic near the Missouri border and many sold their slaves.

Brown's party and the 11 fugitives (soon 12 with the birth of a baby) hid out for several weeks before they reached Tabor on February 4, 1859, for rest and recuperation. "I am once more in Iowa through the great mercy of God," he wrote his family. "Those with me & other friends are well . . . the teams unloaded on the public common that is still the particular attraction of Tabor."

On Sunday morning Rev. John Todd was handed a note on his way into church. It read: "John Brown respectfully requests the church at Tabor to offer public thanksgiving to Almighty God in behalf of himself, & company: & of their rescued captives, in particular for his gracious preservation of their lives, & health, & his signal deliverance of all out of the hand of the wicked hitherto. 'Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.' "

Todd knew that Brown's men had taken a life and stolen horses—both major crimes on the frontier. He asked the advice of Rev. H. D. King, with whom he shared the pulpit. King announced a town meeting the next day, where Brown could speak if he wished.

At the meeting, as Brown made his way to the front, he noticed the arrival of a man from St. Joseph, Missouri, who was passing through Tabor on the stage. Knowing him to be a slaveholder, Brown requested that the Missourian be asked to leave. Members at the meeting responded that if Brown had done nothing wrong, then he should not have a problem with the traveler hearing what he said.

"We are not yet among friends," Brown replied and left the meeting.

Maria Gaston later recounted: "Captain Brown was sick at this time also, and not finding the same sympathy as formerly, it almost broke his heart. He thought we had sadly lost principle, not realizing that he was in a school with very different teachers from ours. I shall never forget his disappointment and anguish accompanied by many tears, when his men returned from the meeting expressing disapproval of his course. He said he must trust in the Lord alone and not rely on earthly friends. The block was crushing. He had expected so much, it was hard to be blamed. At other times he was welcomed and had received all he asked for, and he could not understand why we should not take this advanced step with him."

After Brown had left the meeting, the townspeople resolved: "That while we sympathize with the oppressed, & will do all that we conscientiously can to help them in their efforts for freedom, nevertheless, we have no Sympathy with those who go to Slave States, to entice away Slaves, & take property or life when necessary to attain that end."

Tabor residents had reason to worry about a pro-slavery attack if they seemed too hospitable to Brown. In November, two female slaves owned by Stephen F. Nuckolls, town founder of Nebraska City, had escaped across the river with the help of John Williamson, a local mulatto trader.

Williamson took them to Ira Blanchard in Civil Bend, who in turn transported them to Tabor. A widespread search of the area by Nuckolls turned up nothing, but an unruly mob of his friends searched houses in Civil Bend and delivered two beatings. Tabor residents anticipated the same fate.

Amid these local forebodings, John Brown and his group cut short their stay in Tabor.

Brown's Last Trip across Iowa, 1859

On February 17, Brown and his party arrived at the farm of James Jordan. Although born in the South, Jordan had turned against legalized slavery as a young man in Virginia after helping chase down blacks from a neighboring plantation. Now he farmed about six miles west of Des Moines, a small city of 3,700. Brown's party rested overnight in the timber near Jordan's home.

Three days later, they reached Grinnell, a cluster of 90 houses with 500 residents. Under the leadership of Congregational clergyman Josiah B. Grinnell, the new community had gained a reputation as an antislavery stronghold and a safe harbor for runaways. What dissent that existed among this antislavery majority rose over the extent of racial equality desired and the extent of direct action to be taken in opposing slavery. Prominent among the leading antislavery townspeople were settlers from New England and a contingent of Congregationalists from Oberlin.

Josiah Grinnell had just been reading about Brown and the reward for his capture in the *New York Tribune*. He made room in his house for Brown's men. The female fugitives stayed in a back room in the hotel; old furniture was heaped in front of the door. The male fugitives probably stayed in a nearby grove.

On the day Brown departed, lawyer Amos Bixby remarked: "The old hero & his company created quite an excitement in our little town. They stayed over Sunday. We gave them $25 & provisions enough to last them several days. I mean we the people of Grinnell gave it. . . .

"He thinks of returning to Kansas, but if he does I very much fear he will be taken."

Bixby continued: "The colored people with him are the slaves he liberated by the invasion mentioned. He is a quiet, resolute, keen eyed old man of about sixty years; nothing of the ruffian in appearance, but seems to actuate by high moral and religious principles."

When word got out about the shelter given Brown, Iowa Democratic newspaper editors attacked Josiah Grinnell as a "Negro stealer" who glorified Brown and others who had engaged in "murder and theft."

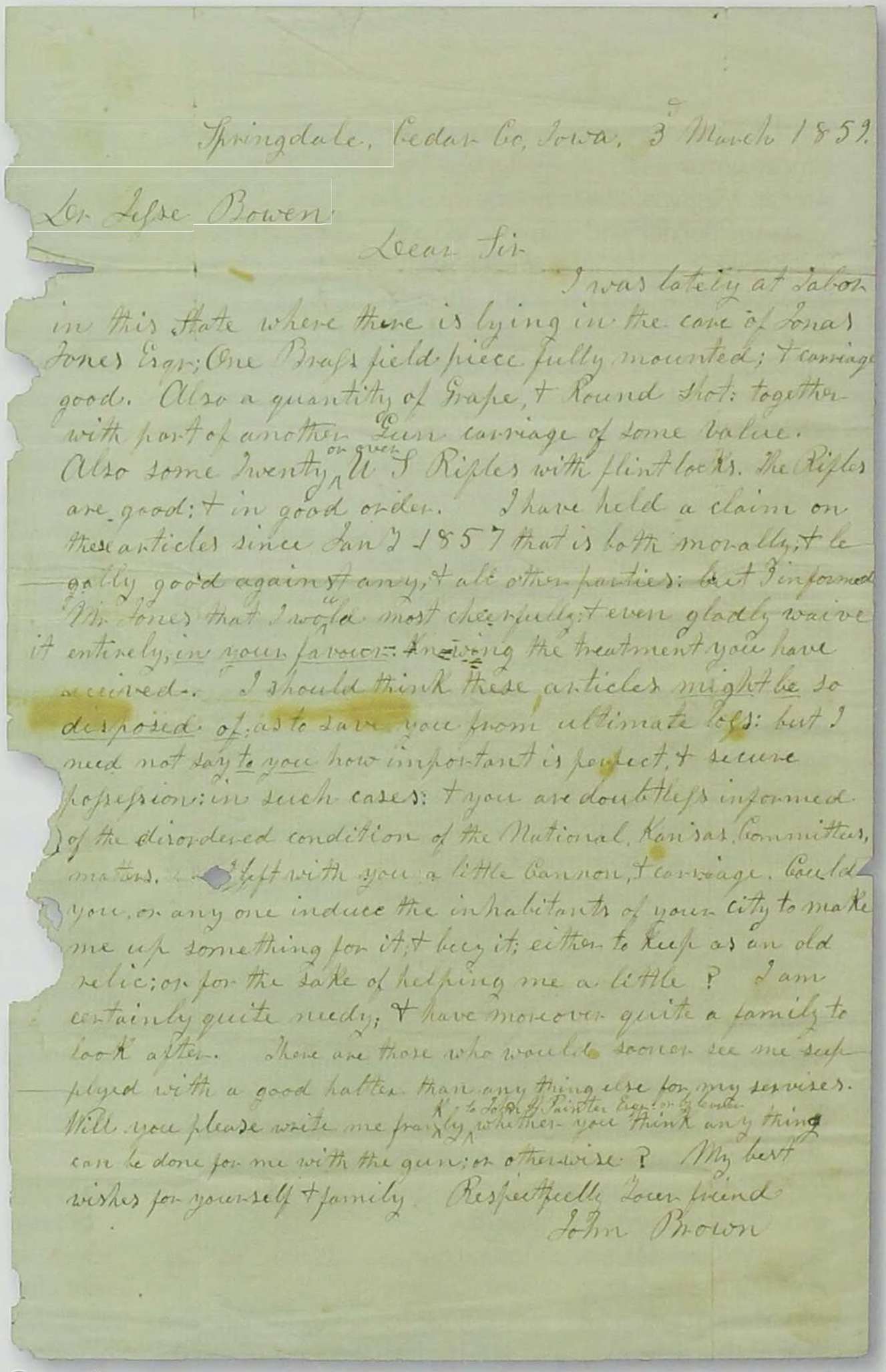
On February 25, Brown's party arrived in Springdale in eastern Iowa. The Quaker hamlet was familiar ground. Indeed, his men had spent the previous winter there, conducting military drill and participating in community debates. Again they stayed with William Maxson, this time for two weeks.

Although the Springdale Quakers opposed slavery, they were ambivalent about Brown's methods. As one Quaker told him, "Friend, I cannot give thee money to buy powder and lead, but here's twenty dollars towards they expenses."

Because the story of Brown's raid in Missouri, had been well publicized, sentries were posted in case a mob from Iowa City might try to intercept Brown. Iowa City lay only 15 miles away, and attitudes toward abolition in the town of 7,000 were sharply divided.

One day Brown sent a message from Springdale to Jesse Bowen in Iowa City. Bowen was a physician and editor of a temperance newspaper (and later a state senator). As an agent of the National Kansas Committee, he received and transferred arms and ammunition consigned to him by emigrant aid associations, and, on behalf of Brown, had taken delivery of revolvers from Massachusetts. Now Brown asked if he could trust Bowen to dispose of arms remaining in Tabor:

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Springdale, Cedar Co, Iowa, 3d March 1859.

Dr Jesse Bowen.

Dear Sir

I was lately at Tabor in this State where there is lying in the care of Jonas Jones Esqr; One Brass field piece fully mounted; & carriage good. Also a quantity of Grape, & Round Shot: together with part of another Gun carriage of some value. Also some Twenty or over U S Riples with flint locks. The Riples are good; & in good order. I have held a claim on these articles since Jan 2 1857 that is both morally; & legally good against any, & all other parties: but I informed Mr. Jones that I would most cheerfully; & even gladly waive it entirely, in your favour. Knowing the treatment you have received. I should think these articles might be so disposed of; as to save you from ultimate loss: but I need not say to you how important is perfect, & secure possession: in such cases: & you are doubtless informed of the disordered condition of the National Kansas Committee, matters. I left with you a little Cannon, & carriage. Could you, or any one induce the inhabitants of your city to make me up something for it, & buy it; either to keep as an old relic; or for the sake of helping me a little? I am certainly quite needy; & have moreover quite a family to look after. There are those who would sooner see me supplyed with a good halter than any thing else for my services. Will you please write me frankly, (& to John G Painter Esqr or Lyons City) whether you think any thing can be done for me with the gun; or otherwise? My best wishes for yourself & family. Respectfully Your friend

John Brown

From Springdale, John Brown wrote to Jesse Bowen, hoping to entrust him with the weapons left in Tabor. Always short of money, Brown also asked if Bowen would buy "a little Cannon, & carriage . . . for the sake of helping me a little."

Dr Jesse Bowen

Dear Sir

I was lately at Tabor in this State where there is lying in the care of Jonas Jones Esqr; One Brass field piece fully mounted; & carriage good. "Also a quantity of Grape & Round shot: together with part of another Gun carriage of some value. Also some Twenty or over U S Rifles with flint locks. The Rifles are good; & in good order. I have held a claim on these articles since Jan 2 1857 that is both morally; & legally good against any, & all other parties: but I informed Mr. Jones that I would most cheerfully; & even gladly waive it entirely, in your favour. Knowing the treatment you have received. I should think these articles might be so disposed of; as to save you from ultimate loss: but I need not say to you how important is perfect, & secure possession: in such cases:

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Respectfully Your friend

John Brown

One evening during the two-week stay in Springdale, Brown and a companion quietly entered Iowa City to meet Bowen and another abolitionist, William Penn Clarke, who was a successful attorney and prominent Republican leader. Brown conferred with them regarding railroad car arrangements to take them east.

Word got out about Brown being in town, and soon others were on the lookout for the antislavery "fanatic." Bowen harbored the two men at his house until the early hours of the morning, when S. C. Trowbridge guided them out of town and to Springdale.

Historian Galin Berrier explains that in addition to Brown conferring with Clarke "on how best to transport the fugitive slaves to Chicago, Grinnell himself went to Chicago and persuaded a suspicious John F. Tracy, the general superintendent of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, to place a boxcar at his disposal for $50."

Clarke arranged with "the station agent at West Liberty to have a boxcar set out in front of Keith's Steam Mill, where Brown and his party had been hidden after coming the ten miles south from Springdale," Berrier continues. "Brown and one of his lieutenants, John Kagi, had dinner at the hotel while waiting for the trian to arrive. When it did, a large crowd was present to see them off. Brown apparently rode in the freight car with the fugitives, while Kagi and Clarke rode in a passenger coach."

Berrier adds, "When the train reached Davenport, where U.S. Marshall Laurel Summers had formed a posse to arrest Brown and capture the fugitives, federal officers walked through the passenger cars, but 'no Negroes were found, and no suspicion was aroused by the freight car.' In Chicago, the fugitives were unloaded in secret to avoid embarrassing the railroad, and [in Davenport] William Penn Clarke apologized to the railroad company's president for the deception."

From there the party went on to Detroit, where they crossed by ferry to freedom in Windsor, Ontario.

Harpers Ferry, 1859

Brown now turned to his ultimate goal: attacking Harpers Ferry. He and his men arrived in the area on July 3, 1859, and rented a farm across the river in Maryland. On the night of October 16, he and several of his men attacked the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry; a few stayed behind as a rear guard. Ten men died (including two of Brown's sons), seven were captured at Harpers Ferry, and five escaped.

Tried by the State of Virginia, Brown and several of his followers were found guilty and hanged in early December. By the time of his execution, he had excited widespread sympathy in the North. Some Americans called him a martyr; others, a traitor.

After the execution, a Congressional investigation committee led by Senator James M. Mason of Virginia inquired into the facts and character of the Harpers Ferry attack. The Democratic majority concluded that the attack was an extension of Brown's intentions pursued in Kansas, namely, to "keep the public mind inflamed on the subject of slavery in the country" and "bring about servile insurrection in the slaver States." The minority report judged it "an offshoot from the extensive outrages and lawlessness in Kansas."

In 44 instances of testimony, the report identified Tabor, Iowa, as the place where 200 Sharps rifles and ammunition had been received, stored, and transferred into Brown's hands.

The citizens of this small Iowa town, so close to the Missouri and Kansas borders, had played an enormous role in the tumultuous events leading up to the Civil War. ❖

Lowell Soike is a long-time historian with the historic preservation office of the State Historical Society of Iowa. In recent years he has directed a federal grant-assisted project on antislavery and underground railroad activity in Iowa.

A substantial collection of materials has been compiled for public use; two National Historic Landmark nominations are in progress; and digitizing of some 4,000 Iowa newspaper articles on the slavery issue and some archaeological work at sites have been completed. Historic markers have been placed on a John Brown Freedom Trail relating to his 1859 journey across Iowa with twelve liberated slaves.

Soike is currently writing a book on antislavery and underground railroad activity in Iowa.